

A Prayer of Repentance

Ps 51:1-9

Psalm 51:1–9 (NKJV) — **1** Have mercy upon me, O God, According to Your lovingkindness; According to the multitude of Your tender mercies, Blot out my transgressions. **2** Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, And cleanse me from my sin. **3** For I acknowledge my transgressions, And my sin is always before me. **4** Against You, You only, have I sinned, And done this evil in Your sight— That You may be found just when You speak, And blameless when You judge. **5** Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, And in sin my mother conceived me. **6** Behold, You desire truth in the inward parts, And in the hidden part You will make me to know wisdom. **7** Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. **8** Make me hear joy and gladness, That the bones You have broken may rejoice. **9** Hide Your face from my sins, And blot out all my iniquities.

Context –

Let me begin by putting this prayer in its rightful context. It is a prayer of repentance by King David after he committing adultery with Bathsheba and then devised a murderous plot to be carried out against Uriah, the husband of Bathsheba, in an attempt to cover up the adultery.

After approximately a year of keeping his sin hidden. God sent Nathan to confront David. In the face of that confrontation, David then confessed his sin.

It was **after his confession**, that David penned this prayer of repentance. And there is a lot to be taken and learned from it.

Even if you have never considered yourself an adulterer or a murderer. I assure you that we have all been equally guilty in the eyes of God. Jesus Himself made it clear that just having unjust anger in your heart towards someone will put you in danger of judgment the same as committing murder. Jesus also noted that looking at another person with lust is the same as committing adultery with them in the heart.

We are all guilty of sin at times and **therefore like David**, you may find ourselves in need of repentance and restoration. So let us see what the Holy Spirit would teach us this afternoon about God's mercy.

David begins his prayer by appealing to God's mercy:

1 Have mercy upon me, O God, According to Your lovingkindness; According to the multitude of Your tender mercies,

Mercy is the sole basis of any approach to God by sinners.

It is fitting that the **covering** of the Ark of Covenant was called the Mercy Seat. It was over the Mercy Seat that the Shekina Glory of God would reside within the Holy of Holies. The Mercy seat itself covered the stone tables of the law that lay in the Ark. Signifying that it was God's mercy that stood between the perfection required by the Law and sinful man. Which by the way was really a foreshadow of Jesus Christ.

David therefore begins his prayer by pleading for God's mercy **not based** on any merit of David's, but entirely on God's loving kindness and tender mercies. **This is important for you and I to understand.** We **can** come to the Lord broken and stained in our sin, seeking His perfect give of mercy. **Not based** on whether or not we deserve it. We could never deserve it. But instead it is **based on his loving mercy.** The Mercy that placed Jesus Christ on the Cross in order to bear our sins.

Though David **did not yet understand God's full plan** of redemption that was to be carried out at Calvary. He knew of God's mercy. And it is because of his certainty of that mercy that David cries out to God for both **forgiveness and cleansing** .

And so David prays:

Blot out my transgressions. **2** Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, And cleanse me from my sin.

Throughout this Psalm, David used the **poetic form of 3-fold repetition.**

David describes the fullness of his sin using the terms **transgressions, iniquity, and sin** as well as his plea for cleansing, using the terms **blot out, wash thoroughly, and cleanse.** These are not mere synonyms, but each word has its own individual place in coming to terms with **sin** and the process of **purification.**

The word **transgression** refers to **crossing a forbidden boundary.** It carries the idea of an act of rebellion against God. David knew that both adultery and murder were against God's Law. Yet **he willingly crossed those forbidden boundaries.** And therefore confesses his failures as transgressions.

And therefore ask **God to blot out the record of his transgressions that were recorded against him.** It is the idea of praying for a clean slate. Praying that the record of indictments would not just be sealed, but blotted out entirely. Never to be read again.

But David didn't stop at **just confessing** his **rebellious** acts. He also realized that his deeds had a common source from which they were rooted. **So he asks that God would thoroughly wash him from his iniquity.**

The term iniquity means "perversion" or being **warped from what is right.**

Referring to what is usually called the **nature** of the **“original sin”** or the **“depravity”** of our nature. Pointing to our inherited **sinful nature that we received from Adam**. A nature bent on sin.

It is within this nature that our evil deeds are rooted. David therefore prays that God would thoroughly wash him of all of his iniquity. He wasn't just asking that the indictment be removed. **But that God would thoroughly scrub his heart.**

Isaiah 1:18 (NKJV) — 18 “Come now, and let us reason together,” Says the LORD, “Though your sins are like scarlet, They shall be as white as snow; Though they are red like crimson, They shall be as wool.

This is an amazing assurance that we can have. The fact that even though our hearts are blackened with sin when we come to the Lord, the blood of Christ washes them white as snow. Leaving no trace or stain behind.

For the 3rd repetition in his confession, David uses the word “sin” itself as he pleads for God to cleanse him from his sin, using **the word cleanse** which is a technical word for the priestly act of ceremonial cleansing. Such as that of being cleansed from the rot of leprosy.

The term **sin as used here** means **“missing the mark”** or **“falling short”**. We fall short of God's nature of perfection just as an arrow might fall short of a target. The intention is to hit the bullseye but the results falls short of that intention of perfection. Meaning that **even when we have every intention** of doing what is right, we fall short.

This is something that is critical that we come to terms with. We are sinners by nature. No matter how hard we try, we in and of ourselves, cannot change that fact. **It is only by blood of Christ and the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit, that this can change.**

Paul himself dealt with the reality of his sinful nature –

Romans 7:18 (NKJV) — 18 For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find.

This reality caused Paul to cry out: **“O wretched man that I am, Who will deliver me from this body of death?”**

This is true of our own sinful nature – in and of ourselves, we are desperately rebellious, warped, and sinful.

Our only hope is based God's mercy offered to us through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Through the blood of Christ, our sin has completely been blotted out. We are both thoroughly washed and cleansed so that we are **not only ceremonially clean**, but we have been given a

new nature all together. A nature that is according to God's nature **not Adam's**. A nature that is based on true righteousness and holiness.

The reality is that without the redeeming work of Christ, we are **but mere wretched men and women carrying** about a body of death and shame. But Christ came to save us from that hopelessness. **But this requires brokenness and repentance on our part.**

3 For I acknowledge my transgressions, And my sin is always before me.

David waited a whole year before **coming to terms with** and confessing his sin. Much like Adam and Eve's response after sinning, David hid from God for a full year. Not physically but spiritually. **His words recorded in Psalm 32 speak of the misery brought about by concealing his sin.**

Psalm 32:3–4 (NKJV) — 3 When I kept silent, my bones grew old Through my groaning all the day long. **4** For day and night **Your hand was heavy upon me;** My **vitality was turned into the drought** of summer.

Our unconfessed sin is always before us. It impacts our fellowship with the Lord and robs us of our strength and joy.

David acknowledged not only the fact of his sin, but **he also acknowledged who his sin was ultimately against.**

4 Against You, You only, have I sinned, And done this evil in Your sight— That You may be found just when You speak, And blameless when You judge.

Now it might seem odd that David attributes his sin **as only being against God.** His sin against Uriah is obvious. But David also abused his authority over Bathsheba by having her taken to him knowing she was married. David also sinned against his nation because of his position as King as well as against his own family.

Yet the reality is that **when we sin,** it is first and foremost against God. God is the ultimate judge **and He alone sets the standard of righteousness.** This fact does not get us off the hook in **having to make restitutions or having to ask for forgiveness from others.**

But ultimately **we must acknowledge that all sin is against God.** Therefore God is just and right in His judgment against sin and against the sinner. **Again, our only hope is God's mercy.**

5 Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, And in sin my mother conceived me. **6** Behold, You desire truth in the inward parts, And in the hidden part You will make me to know wisdom.

David isn't trying to shift the blame of his sinful nature away from himself. But instead he acknowledges the **depth of his sinful nature.**

One of the most amazing gifts of God's mercy is when the Holy Spirit reveals the true condition of our heart. **The fact that we are desperately and wickedly sinful. It is in the brokenness of this reality that we will find his mercy and forgiveness.**

The apostle Paul shared that this was the true intention of the law. To reveal our wickedness and to help us see our desperate need for a savior:

Romans 5:20–21 (NLT) — 20 God's law was given so that all **people could see how sinful they were.** But as people sinned more and more, God's wonderful grace became more abundant. **21** So just as sin ruled over all people and brought them to death, **now God's wonderful grace rules instead, giving us right standing with God** and resulting in eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Just because we are born as a sinner does not excuse us. David acknowledged that God desires faithfulness from the inward being. He therefore asks God in his prayer **to help him know wisdom in his heart.**

Shamefully, I spent many years as a Christian, walking according to the world and even downplaying my own sin. Often justifying my actions thinking, hey, I am just a sinner saved by grace. **Acting as if God didn't have any right to expect anything different from me.** But David knew that God desires a commitment from the heart. And he therefore asked God to give him wisdom deep his heart.

We also need to be praying that the Holy Spirit will change our hearts towards sin. That He will give us wisdom and strength enabling us to walk in obedience. **Not trampling on the grace of God** as I **foolishly** did for so many years. But instead we are to come to God in the brokenness of our sin.

David continues to pray for cleansing.

7 Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. 8 Make me hear joy and gladness, That the bones You have broken may rejoice. 9 Hide Your face from my sins, And blot out all my iniquities.

The first-time hyssop was mentioned in the bible was during the Passover. The blood of the Passover lamb was painted on the door frame by use of the hyssop. Later it was used in ceremonial cleansings performed by the priests.

David's request to be purged with hyssop points to the fact that he understood that his forgiveness **could only come through a sacrificial death.** So when he asked that God cleanse him with hyssop he meant "Forgive me and regard me as cleansed on the basis of a substitutionary sacrifice."

I am reminded that the Heb 9:22 notes that without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.

That is how we must also come to God. We desperately need forgiveness. But we must realize that “without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.”

It is only on the basis of the blood of Jesus Christ that we may find God’s mercy. **Jesus rightly claimed that no one comes to the Father except through Himself.** Because his sacrifice is the only means to God’s mercy.

<p>1 John 1:9 If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.</p>

As I close I ask you, is there sin in your life that has not been dealt with? I invite you this afternoon to cry out to God for His mercy. Confess your sin and **place your faith in Jesus’s sacrifice.** Your sin may be as great as David’s, or even greater. But however great or small it is, **you will find God to be wonderfully merciful if you will come to him, in brokenness and repentance.** He will then cleanse you of your sin and restore your joy.

Close in prayer